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U.S. moving to 'a zero security society'

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WASHINGTON — Americans should demand a reversal of limitations on domestic intelligence-gathering that are rapidly moving the country toward "a zero-security society," Sen. Orrin G. Hatch, R-Utah, said Friday.

Citizens' rights to safety from criminals have been sacrificed for an excessive concern about individual rights, Hatch told a news conference. While some law enforcement and intelligence agencies have committed "abuses in our society" in the past, he said, now there are "abuses to our society."

Hearings before the Senate Judiciary Committee, where he is a member, have convinced him that the ability of law enforcement agencies to protect individuals, their communities and the nation have been dangerously weakened, the senator said.

THE AGENCIES have been stripped of much of their ability to deal with domestic subversion, espionage, terrorism and organized crime," he said.

Because employers are hindered in exchanging information about workers, Hatch said, "rape, arson, murder and violence are going on in our hospitals. It makes me not want to go to a hospital."

The erosion in intelligence aimed at preventing crime before it happens was caused, he said, by a post-Watergate "anti-intelligence hysteria," a hostility in the press to intelligence operations, a rash of privacy laws, and an epidemic of civil suits against enforcement personnel.

Later this year, he said, a presidential privacy study commission will recommend "still more radical measures" to restrict collection, distribution and use of intelligence information.

"SOMEHOW WE have got to turn this entire situation around," Hatch said.

"We must amend the Freedom of Information Act and the Privacy Act so that the criminal elements in our society and those who would destroy our society can no longer use them for their own nefarious ends.

"FBI Director William H. Webster has suggested that investigative files be exempted from release for a period of 10 years. That makes sense."

Hatch also proposed ending "the present disastrous freeze" on intelligence exchange among enforcement agencies; assurances to informants that their identity will be safeguarded; a system for immediate access to travel, bank and other records in terrorism, kidnapping and espionage cases; rebuilding of the federal employee security program; and allowing private employers to have access to some criminal background files.

Laurence Silberman, a former deputy attorney general and diplomat, said it's outrageous that criminals and others must be furnished with FBI files on themselves under the Freedom of Information Act.

No person approached by FBI agents for information in an investigation "can be sure that his identity will not be disclosed," he said.